767
C34
Barn

CATALOGUE

OF A

SELECTION OF ETCHINGS

BY

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI

BELONGING TO THE

CURTIS COLLECTION



ON EXHIBITION AT

MOUNT KISCO, NEW YORK

FROM OCTOBER, 1903, TO MARCH

1904

CATALOGUE

OF A

SELECTION OF ETCHINGS

BY

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI

BELONGING TO THE

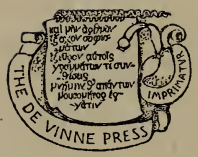
CURTIS COLLECTION

ON EXHIBITION AT

MOUNT KISCO, NEW YORK

FROM OCTOBER, 1903, TO MARCH

1904


IMPRIMATUR
THE DE VINNE PRESS

INTRODUCTION.

Accounts differ as to the date and place of Piranesi's birth. According to some, he was born in Rome in 1707, while others state that he was born in 1721; but the date most generally accepted is 1720, and the place of birth, Venice. At all events, we know that he was born in the early part of the eighteenth century and that he died on November 9, 1778.

He was an architect by profession, but had he not etched the remarkable series of plates by which he is now known we should probably never have heard his name. These plates, done for the most part on a very large scale, were undertaken for the purpose of selling to the public representations of the celebrated buildings and ruins of Italy, chiefly in or near Rome, exactly as a photographer would sell a series of photographic views to-day. The prints were usually bound in sets, which necessitated the folding of the larger ones, much to their injury in a great many cases. The most important of these sets are the "Vedute di Roma," "Antichità Romane," "Antichità di Cora," "Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo," the views of the temples of Pæstum, and the "Carcere d'invenzione nuova," which last does not contain views of actual buildings, but is a series of prisons drawn from imagination.

Piranesi claims our attention from two points of view, the archæological and the artistic. Archæologically his works are of great interest, especially as many of the buildings and ruins drawn by him have since disappeared

p 1181

or have undergone numerous changes, and his records enable us to see some of the old Roman remains as they were a hundred and fifty years ago.

But interesting as is his work from the documentary side, it is as an artist that he makes his greatest appeal to us. With the single exception of Charles Meryon, no one has ever etched architecture so artistically and at the same time with so much feeling as Giovanni Battista Piranesi. He put into his work an individual charm, the outcome of his own poetic temperament, while preserving a most faithful rendering of the building before him. In common with Meryon, he gives us, as no other etcher has, renderings of architecture which breathe the very spirit of the buildings themselves, walls built up stone upon stone, houses in which we feel three dimensions; and while doing this he goes farther still and, like Meryon, gives us a subtle touch here and there, adding light and shade in a fascinating manner, putting life into his work by little figures which, though not wonders of drawing, serve their purpose well; and thus, by a something added of his own, he produces pictures which show us the buildings in their most charming aspect and make them more real than they could be made by any one who lacked his poetic feeling and artistic sense. Every building has its own individuality. Its character is portrayed with as much study and as much insight into its nature as a great portrait painter would give to the depicting of his model. Unlike some of the modern men who have obtained reputations for their etching of architecture, Piranesi does not treat every piece of architecture in the same manner, with the result that everything is sacrificed to his particular mannerism and that an old Roman ruin has the same aspect as a Renaissance building. His own personality is kept in his work; but he knows how to combine his individuality with that of the building he is etching, and even through his poetic instincts to give more intensity to its character by show-

ing us his feeling for its beauty or whatever of interest he sees in it.

Piranesi was a master technician. His handling of his plates from the technical side is remarkable. He had a minute way of drawing details which one would think ought to have produced results anything but broad in character. And especially is this so when we consider the great size of many of his finest plates and the small instrument with which he had to work in covering so large a surface. But broadness does not depend upon the fewness of lines with which a thing is expressed. It depends upon the seeing of things as a whole and the keeping of all the parts in proper relation to one another, and in proper subordination to the general effect. This Piranesi understood to perfection. Even in his largest plates he knew exactly how to hold together the relationship of all the parts. Every part is drawn with care, but with such truth in its relation to every other part that the result is a work perfect in harmony, and giving, as it should give, a feeling of completeness which makes us lose sight of the details in the contemplation of the whole. Not until we have given attentive study to the details do we begin to realize the beautiful way in which every portion of the composition is handled.

In his "Prisons," Piranesi touches a different note from what we have in his other work. Here reality is not sought, and a style of execution is developed differing entirely from his usual manner. He works more freely, though not in a larger way. The "Prisons" being creations of his imagination, he is at liberty to let himself go to anything he pleases; and while the results are less great than his work in other directions, the series is full of fascination. It is composed of plates in most of which we feel the imagination of an "Arabian Nights'" story—interior views of gigantic structures, now piling up in seemingly endless masses of masonry, arch above arch, and wall above wall, until one's brain is lost in the

following of it all, now overpowering us with their tremendously ponderous walls and arches made to resist one knows not what human or superhuman attack.

Piranesi's work is very unequal in artistic merit, and the reason for this is obvious. He etched some thousand plates in all; and out of these a large proportion were subjects that had no artistic attraction for him whatever. They were done because of the interest they would have for the public, and, the artistic element being absent, they do not appeal to us as works of art. That an artist should etch hundreds of plates merely because the public demanded them, when he himself saw nothing in them from the artistic side, would seem, at first, to be a debasing of his art; but we must remember the two points of view from which Piranesi's work was done. To him the depicting of the buildings and ruins of his country was of great importance even when the buildings were not artistically interesting to him; and we should judge his work from his standpoint. We should consider the majority of his plates from the archæological side, bearing in mind that photography did not exist in his day, and be thankful for the many wonderful plates in which he did have opportunities to reveal his artistic side with such results as we see in him when he is at his best.

ATHERTON CURTIS.

CATALOGUE.

VIEWS OF ROME. ("VEDUTE DI ROMA.")

Published in 1748.

1. THE PIAZZA NAVONA.

 The fountain in the centre and the one in the foreground are by Bernini. At the left is the church of S. Agnese.

2. SQUARE OF ST. JOHN LATERAN.

 In the centre are seen the Lateran Palace, now used as a museum, and the south entrance of the church of St. John Lateran, which is attached to the palace. The octagonal building at the right is the baptistery.

3. ST. PETER'S.

 The cathedral was begun in 1506 and was consecrated in 1626. Its cost up to the end of the seventeenth century had amounted to about $50,000,000 in actual money; but, taking into account the difference in the value of money then and now, its real cost was four or five times this amount. The building was designed originally by Bramante, but little remains of his plans owing to the changes made by the many architects who succeeded him. The dome is the work of Michael Angelo, and the façade is by Carlo Maderna. The colonnades were erected by Bernini in 1667. Over the right colonnade is seen a part of the Vatican Palace.

4. INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE.

 The interior dates from the time of Sixtus III, in the fifth century. The ceiling was designed by Giuliano da Sangallo in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

5. The Island of the Tiber. (Isola Tiberina.)
6. The Wall of Tarquin and the Cloaca Maxima.
 The Cloaca Maxima, the outlet of which is the nearest arch in the wall at the water's edge, was built by Tarquinius Priscus, about 600 B.C., for the purpose of draining the Forum and the surrounding low ground. It still does good service. Above the buildings in the foreground is seen the Round Temple shown in No. 10.
7. The Colosseum.
 Originally called the Amphitheatrum Flavium. Its present name dates from the eighth century. The building was completed by Titus in 80 A.D. Its circumference is nearly one third of a mile and it had seats for 87,000 spectators.
8. The Pantheon.
 Built by Agrippa, son-in-law of Augustus, in 27 B.C. It is the only ancient edifice in Rome which is still in complete preservation with walls and roof. The two bell-towers, constructed by Bernini in the seventeenth century, were removed in 1883.
9. The Portico of the Pantheon.
10. Temple of Cybele.
 The name here given is Piranesi's, but the temple was more probably dedicated to Hercules or to Mater Matuta, goddess of dawn and of birth. It is now often called "Round Temple," because of the uncertainty of its ancient name.
11. Remains of the Forum of Nerva.
12. The Porta Maggiore.
 The gateway was originally one of the arches of the aqueduct built by Claudius in 52 A.D.
13. The Ponte Salario.
 The bridge was blown up during the invasion of Garibaldi.

14. Ruins of the Aqueduct of Nero.
15. Tomb of Cæcilia Metella, on the Via Appia near Rome.

 Cæcilia Metella was the daughter of Metellus Creticus and wife of the younger Crassus, son of the triumvir.
16. Temple of Bacchus in the Environs of Rome. (Exterior View.)

 This old Roman tomb, which for many years was thought to have been a temple of Bacchus, is now the church of San Urbano. It was converted into a church probably in the eleventh century.
17. The Same Temple. (Interior View.)
18. Villa of Mæcenas at Tivoli. (Exterior View.)

 This is a misnomer, though it is the name by which it is still known.
19. The Same Villa. (Interior View.)
20. A Gallery in the Villa of Hadrian near Tivoli.

 The villa, with its grounds, occupies an area of several square miles. It was built by Hadrian toward the end of his reign. He died in 138 A.D. Many of the most valuable treasures of ancient art now in the museums of Rome were found in the ruins of this villa.
21. Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli.

 Thought by some authorities to have been a temple of Vesta or of Hercules.

Roman Antiquities. ("Antichità Romane.")

Published in 1756.

22. The Forum of Nerva.
23. The Forum of Nerva, showing the Colonnacce.

 In the "Colonnacce" are seen the remains of the Temple of Minerva, which stood formerly at the end of the Forum.
24. Ruins of the Temple of Jupiter Tonans.

Antiquities (Antichità) of Albano and of Castel Gandolfo.

Published in 1762.

25. Remains of Roman Baths in the Vineyard of the Jesuits at Castel Gandolfo.

Antiquities of Cora. ("Antichità di Cora.")

Published in 1763.

26. Temple of Hercules.
27. Temple of Castor and Pollux.

The Temples of Pæstum.

Published in 1778.

Pæstum, near Naples, was founded by the Greeks about 600 B.C., its ancient name being "Poseidonia." There are still standing the ruins of three temples which are the finest examples of their kind to be found outside of Athens. The Temple of Neptune, which is earlier than the other two, is one of the oldest existing specimens of Greek architecture.

28. View of the Three Temples.

In the foreground is the so-called Basilica; in the distance is the Temple of Ceres, or, as some say, of Vesta; and between the two is the Temple of Neptune.

29. The Pronaos of the Temple of Neptune.
30. The Cella of the Temple of Neptune.

Prisons of New Device. ("Carcere d'invenzione nuova.")

Published in 1750.

31. Plate XIII.
32. Plate XIV.
33. Plate XV.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY
3 0112 062300634